

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 KHARTO 00008 051149Z

21

ACTION SS-25

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O R 051010Z JAN 76
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 874
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMCONSUL ASMARA

S E C R E T KHARTOUM 08/5

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, ET
SUBJECT: KAGNEW FIVE

1. DURING CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT NIMEIRI JAN 4,
I SAID I WISHED RAISE ONE MATTER WHICH WAS CONTINUING TO CAUSE
DEEP CONCERN AT HOME, NAMELY THE CONTINUED DETENTION OF
AMERICAN HOSTAGES BY ERITREAN ELEMENTS. WE REMAINED MOST
APPRECIATIVE OF WHAT NIMEIRI AND HIS OFFICIALS WERE DOING
TO SEEK TO FREE OUR CITIZENS. UNFORTUNATE FACT WAS, HOWEVER,
THAT NONE SO FAR RELEASED WHILE A FIFTH HAD JUST BEEN SEIZED.
NIMEIRI SAID HE WAS UNAWARE OF LATTER CASE SO I PROVIDED
MICHALKE'S NAME AND COMPANY AFFILIATION IN WRITING TO FONMIN
AHMED WHO WAS PRESENT.

2. NIMEIRI ASSURED ME HE WAS CONTINUING TO WORK ON THIS
PROBLEM WHICH HE KNEW WAS ONE OF GREAT CONCERN TO US. HE
HOPED "AT LEAST TWO" OF THE HOSTAGES WOULD BE FREED "VERY SOON."
HOWEVER, HE, NIMEIRI HAD PROBLEMS DEALING WITH THE ERITREANS,
SOME OF WHOM WERE "COMMUNISTS" AND HATED HIM FOR HIS
ANTI-COMMUNISM. THERE WERE ALSO INTERNAL DIFFERENCES WITHIN
THE ERITREAN MOVEMENT. AND, NIMEIRI ADDED, COMMUNICATIONS
WERE SO DIFFICULT HE HAD HAD TO SEND HIS OWN PEOPLE INSIDE TO
FOLLOW UP CONTACTS (HE CAREFULLY EXPLAINED THESE WERE NOT GOS
OFFICIALS BUT EITHER "SUDANESE ERITREANS OR ERITREAN SUDANESE."
PRESIDENT THEN SAID THAT FOREIGNERS SHOULD NOT MOVE AROUND IN

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ERITREA OUTSIDE MAIN CENTERS, LEST THEY JEOPARDIZE THEIR

SAFETY. I IMMEDIATELY REPLIED THAT FIVE HOSTAGES HAD IN EVERY CASE BEEN ABDUCTED BY ERITREAN RAIDING PARTIES, EITHER AT WORK OR AT HOME. NIMEIRI INDICATED THIS WAS NEW INFORMATION TO HIM AND THAT SUCH TERRORISM COULD NOT BE COUNTENANCED. HE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD ALL HOSTAGES WERE MILITARY MEN. I TOLD HIM THAT THIS WAS NOT THE CASE, AS THREE WERE CIVILIANS WORKING FOR A PRIVATE COMPANY UNDER CONTRACT TO USG.

3. PRESIDENT TOLD ME HE WAS CONTINUALLY PRESSED INDIRECTLY BY ERITREANS RE ALLEGED MAJOR USG MILITARY SUPPORT TO ETHIOPIA, SOME OF WHICH WAS BEING USED TO KILL ERITREANS. HE ASKED WHAT ANSWER HE COULD GIVE THEM. I REPLIED THAT, TO BEST MY KNOWLEDGE, ONLY SIGNIFICANT MILITARY TRANSACTION IN LAST YEAR WAS USG AUTHORIZATION TO PERMIT PURCHASE AND EXPORT FROM US OF \$7 MILLION WORTH OF AMMUNITION. USG HAD BEEN MAIN ARMS SUPPLIER TO ETHIOPIA FOR MANY YEARS. OUR FAILURE PROVIDE AT LEAST MINIMAL RESPONSE MIGHT NOT ONLY HAVE CAUSED DIRG TO TURN ELSEWHERE BUT COULD ALSO HAVE CALLED INTO QUESTION LONG-TERM RELIABILITY OF US MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO OTHER COUNTRIES. NIMEIRI INDICATED HE FULLY APPRECIATED THESE ARGUMENTS AND CLAIMED HE HAD PROVIDED SIMILAR RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS PUT TO HIM. HOWEVER, ERITREANS DESIRED SOME STATEMENT RE TERMINATION USG ARMS SUPPLY ETHIOPIA AS PRICE RELEASING HOSTAGES. I RESPONDED BY CITING OUR WELL-KNOWN POSITION AGAINST NEGOTIATING WITH TERRORISTS, STRESSING THAT, IF ERITREANS THOUGHT THEY COULD EXERCISE INFLUENCE ON USG POLICY THROUGH CONTINUED DETENTION HOSTAGES, THEY WERE MUCH MISTAKEN. BEST COURSE IN THEIR OWN INTEREST WOULD SEEM TO BE PROMPT RELEASE FIVE MEN WHICH WOULD AT LEAST PREVENT FURTHER BITTERNESS AND CRITICISM AGAINST ERITREANS ON PART AMERICAN OPINION.

4. COMMENT: FROM NIMEIRI'S COMMENTS, IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT HE FULLY UNDERSTANDS IMPORTANCE WE ATTACH TO EARLY, UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE HOSTAGES AND IS DOING WHAT HE CAN TO BRING THIS ABOUT. HIS REFERENCE TO RELEASE AT LEAST TWO VERY SOON IS ENCOURAGING AND MAY HAVE SOME BASIS. ITALIAN AMBASSADOR HAS TOLD ME IN CONSPIRATIONAL TONES THAT HE HOPES ITALIAN HOSTAGE MAY BE RELEASED SHORTLY, THOUGH HE FEARS THIS MAY SIMPLY OCCUR ON OUTSKIRTS ASMARA.

BREWER

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